IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) An ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus comprising:

an image acquisition component which acquires input image data from a printed medium in which ~~image~~digital watermark information is embedded;

an extracting component which extracts the ~~image~~digital watermark information from the input image data; and

~~an image~~a digital watermark information modification component which generates new ~~image~~digital watermark information by modifying the ~~image~~digital watermark information when the ~~image~~digital watermark information complies with a predetermined ~~condition,~~ finite copy condition stored in the digital watermark information, and generates copied image data by embedding the new ~~image~~digital watermark information into image data obtained by removing the ~~image~~digital watermark information from the input image ~~data.~~data when the digital watermark information complies with said predetermined finite copy condition stored in the digital watermark information.

2. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein:

said ~~image~~digital watermark information contains copy control information for limiting an allowable number of times the input image data is copied; and

when determining that the copy control information contains a variable value representing permission to copy the input image data, said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component generates the new ~~image~~digital watermark information by modifying the variable value and generates the copied image data.

3. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component determines that the copy control information contains the variable value representing permission to copy the input image data when the variable value is within a predetermined range.

4. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component modifies the variable value by a smaller amount with a higher level of access authorization of a user, and modifies the variable value by a larger amount with a lower level of the access authorization level of a user.

5. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, further comprising a recording component which stores the ~~image~~digital watermark information extracted by said extracting component, wherein:

when determining that the ~~image~~digital watermark information contains a flag value representing image data of an original file and the same ~~image~~digital watermark information is not stored in said recording component, said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component generates the new ~~image~~digital watermark information to write the generated new ~~image~~digital watermark information into the recording component and generates the copied image data;

when determining that the ~~image~~digital watermark information contains a flag value representing the image data of an original file and that the same ~~image~~digital watermark information is stored in said recording component, said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component modifies the variable value that is contained within the ~~image~~digital watermark information stored in said recording component, and generates the new ~~image~~digital watermark information and the copied image data; and

when determining that the ~~image~~digital watermark information contains a flag value not representing the image data of an original file, said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component does not generate the copied image data.

6. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein, when determining that the ~~image~~digital watermark information contains a flag value representing image data of an original file, said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component generates the new ~~image~~digital watermark information by changing the flag value to a value not representing image data of an original file, and generates the copied image data.

7. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein, when determining that a level of access authorization of a user is equal to or larger than a predetermined level, said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component can provide the copied image data having the same ~~image~~digital watermark information as that of the input image data, without generating the new ~~image~~digital watermark information.

8. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component generates the new ~~image~~digital watermark information by adding personal identification information of a user to the ~~image~~digital watermark information.

9. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component generates the new ~~image~~digital watermark information by adding identification information of a system to the ~~image~~digital watermark information, and said ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus is integrated in said system.

10-15. (canceled)

16. (currently amended) ~~An image~~A digital watermark information processing method comprising the steps of:

acquiring input image data from a printed medium in which ~~image~~digital watermark information is embedded;

extracting the ~~image~~digital watermark information from the input image data;

determining whether or not the extracted ~~image~~digital watermark information complies with a predetermined ~~condition;~~ finite copy condition stored in the digital watermark information; and

generating new ~~image~~digital watermark information by modifying the ~~image~~digital watermark information when it is determined that the ~~image~~digital watermark information

complies with said predetermined ~~condition,~~ finite copy condition and generating copied image data by embedding the new ~~image~~digital watermark information into image data obtained by removing the ~~image~~digital watermark information from the input image ~~data.~~data when it is determined that the digital watermark information complies with said predetermined condition, finite copy condition stored in the digital watermark information.

17. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 3, wherein said ~~image~~digital watermark information modification component modifies the variable value by a smaller amount with a higher level of access authorization of a user, and modifies the variable value by a larger amount with a lower level of the access authorization level of a user.

18-19. (canceled)

20. (currently amended) The ~~image~~digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the new ~~image~~digital watermark information is embedded to the printed medium as a background pattern.

21. (new) The digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the predetermined finite copy condition is modified with the generating the copied image data to allow a finite number of copies of the image data.

22. (new) The digital watermark information processing apparatus according to Claim 16, wherein the predetermined finite copy condition is modified with the generating the copied image data to allow a finite number of copies of the image data.